

Prescribed Grazing: Managing Your Pasture

Tennessee Conservation Practice Job Sheet

528

Does your pasture have -

Bare ground?

Standing water after a rain?

Weeds (reoccurring even after spraying)?

Areas that the animals won't graze and overgrazed areas?

Slow plant growth?

Compacted areas?

Lots of livestock paths?



Overgrazed

Many pasture problems such as slow growth, weed invasions, and bare ground are commonly caused by the pasture management activities being used. Renovating your pasture may provide temporary improvements, but you will need to change your pasture management to have long-term or sustainable improvements. Grazing management is the key to healthy, productive pastures; and healthy, productive pastures are the key to healthy, productive animals. No matter the grazing system, overgrazing reduces and can eliminate benefits.

Benefits of Pasture Management:

Improve forage quality.

Improve forage yield.

Feed less hay and silage.

Better distribution of manure (nutrients).

Pounds of nutrients potentially returned to the land/acre/year (85-57-190).

Decrease weed infestations.

Decrease soil compaction.

Decrease soil washouts.

Improve the health and productivity of your animals.

Improved utilization of excess forage.



Proper Grazing Height

A well managed pasture can improve the environment and your bottom line.

Managing your Pasture

What are your goals?

When setting your goals, think of yourself as a grass farmer, not a livestock producer. Think of your livestock as a way to harvest and sell the grass. It doesn't matter whether the grass is produced on permanent pasture, cropland in a sod rotation, or marginal land.

A good, overall goal is to produce enough high quality forage to feed your livestock by grazing for as much of the year as possible. Grazing is the least expensive way to harvest forage. You can lower your input costs by optimizing the use of your pasture.

Production goals should be based on the economic return per acre, not the production per animal. Compare the pounds produced per acre or per dollar you invested instead of animal weight gain or milk production per animal. This type of comparison will show your actual profit more clearly.



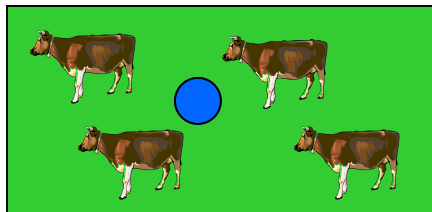
Choosing a Grazing System

Continuous Grazing, sometimes called extensive grazing, is when livestock graze one large, undivided pasture and is probably the most commonly used system. Given the choice, the animals eat the best tasting and most nutritious plants in the pasture and often kill them by over-grazing. The coarser, less desirable plants are under-grazed and often spread throughout the pasture. This, in turn, allows weeds to become a serious problem. The over-grazing of preferred areas and trailing caused by repetitive walking, exposes bare ground and can cause soil washouts in the pasture.

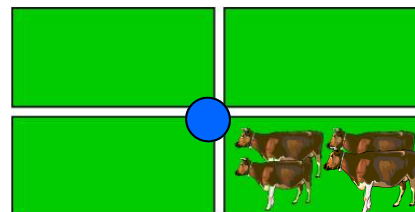
In a Rotational Grazing system, the animals rotate between small pastures or paddocks. Rotational grazing is also called controlled or management intensive grazing. Management intensive grazing typically refers to systems with numerous small paddocks where animals are moved every two-three days or more often. A controlled or rotational grazing system can be as simple as dividing your pasture into two paddocks. The size and shape of the paddocks are flexible.

What's the Difference?	Continuous Grazing	Rotational Grazing
Pasture Size and Shape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One large pasture. Size and shape are rarely changed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 to 45 pastures or paddocks. Flexible in size and shape.
Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Water troughs or other water systems are usually not provided. Livestock typically use streams or ponds for drinking water. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Water troughs or other water systems are provided in each paddock. Livestock typically have limited or no access to streams.
Fencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only have a stationary perimeter fence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have a perimeter fence with portable, usually electric, interior fencing to subdivide the large pasture into paddocks.

**Which
grazing
system is best
for you?**



Continuous Grazing



Rotational Grazing

Livestock Distribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Livestock graze a pasture continually. • Livestock have access to the entire pasture at all times. • Livestock often congregate in one spot for long periods. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Livestock graze for a limited time. • Livestock are moved to optimize forage use. • Livestock do not congregate in one spot for long periods.
Forage Production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-growth is typically slow because the pasture is never rested. • Many bare areas with no forage. • Lower yields. • Height of forage used to determine when to feed hay—3 inches. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-growth is typically faster because paddocks are rested for 14-42 days. • Denser ground cover. • Higher yields. • Height of forage used to determine when to graze and when to move animals to a new paddock—3 inches. Begin grazing at 5 to 8 inches height.
Forage Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Livestock overgraze some areas and do not utilize other areas. • Livestock utilize 30-50 percent of the pasture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Livestock graze more uniformly. • Livestock utilize 50-70+ percent of the pasture.
Nutrients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Animal waste is usually concentrated where livestock congregate. • Manure needs to be spread. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Animal waste is more evenly distributed because animals are discouraged from congregating. • No need to spread manure.
Stocking Rate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports less livestock per acre. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports more livestock per acre.
Feed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typically requires more feed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feed costs decrease because livestock graze more efficiently.
Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start-up costs are lower. • Long-term costs are typically higher because you feed more hay, have more weeds to control, and may have erosion problems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Startup costs are higher because you have additional costs of portable fencing and water troughs. • Long-term costs are lower because you feed less hay, have fewer weeds, and erosion problems.
The Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soil quality, water quality, plant health, animal health, and productivity typically decrease over time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soil quality, water quality, plant health, animal health, and productivity increase over time.
Bottom Line	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The net profit for dairies using rotational grazing was 72 percent higher than dairies using a continuous grazing system. Both had higher profits than confinement dairies. • Beef yield per acre in a rotational grazing system increased by 35 to 61 percent. More beef per acre, at a lower cost = greater profit. • Rotational grazing increases efficiency and productivity. 	

Technical Help is Available

Your local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office has experienced conservationists that can help you develop a pasture management system. NRCS can help you determine how to manage grazing height. They can also help you develop a Conservation Plan to solve other problems you have identified on your farm.

There is no charge for our assistance. Simply call your local office to set up an appointment, and we will come to your farm.

You may also be eligible to receive financial assistance through a state or federal program. Your NRCS office will explain any programs that are available so you can make the best decision for your operation. All NRCS programs and services are voluntary.



Helping People Held the Land

For more information contact the:

Natural Resources Conservation Service

<http://www.tn.nrcs.usda.gov>

or

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/efotg>

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